Gun Control Pleas Follow Sniper Attack

By Robert L. Asher
Washington Post Staff Writer

The sniper massacre that terrorized the University of Texas Monday triggered a barrage of strong calls yesterday for prompt passage of the Administration's long-stalled gun control bill, with President Johnson personally spurring the drive.

"What happened is not without a lesson," the Chief Executive said of the "shocking tragedy" that left 15 dead of the sniper's bullets. "We must press urgently for the legislation."

Noting that the bill, which has been bogged down in a touch-and-go legislative battle for more than a year, would curb indiscriminate sales of firearms, Mr. Johnson said "the time has come for action before further loss of life that might be prevented by its passage."

The President, who urged passage of the bill months ago as part of his "war on crime," stressed that though the legislation would not prevent tragedies, "it would help reduce

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the unrestricted sale of firearms to those who cannot be trusted in their use or possession. How many lives might be saved as a consequence!"

Armed with the President's plea made "in sorrow and hope," key supporters in Congress echoed the Chief Executive's call.

Dodd Calls for Vote

Sen. Thomas J. Dodd (D-Conn.), chairman of the Senate Judiciary subcommittee on juvenile delinquency and leader of a six-year battle to enact controls, issued a blast at opponents of the measure and cancelled for an immediate full committee vote on the bill.

Terming the opposition of sporting groups and the National Rifle Association "replete with misinformation," Dodd said Monday's deaths "and the thousands of others caused by firearms in recent years must weigh heavily upon the consciences of these lobbying groups."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), a member of the subcommittee, also attacked the gun lobby, calling for support now from "the lobby of the American people."

Even if those who want guns badly enough can still get them despite new laws, Kennedy said, Congress must act to "minimize the senseless bloodshed and crime effectuated through these instruments of destruction."

Sen. George A. Smathers (D-Fla.), also took to the floor to endorse the bill.

Lawmakers' Reactions

In the House—where hearings were held last year and nothing has been done since—both Speaker John W. McCormack (D-Mass.) and Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.) urged passage of new controls.

But Rep. Wilbur D. Mills (D-Ark.), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, was noncommittal on what action might be taken. He indicated that his committee would continue to await Senate action.

Other legislators joining the call for firearms control included House Majority Whip Hale Boggs (D-La.); Sen. Ralph Yarborough (D-Tex.); Reps. Sam Gibbons and Charles E. Bennett, Florida Democrats; Sen. Edward V. Long (D-Mo.), and Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.).

Opponents Reply

But Sen Roman L. Hruska (R.-Neb.), a long-time opponent of the Senate bill, said it was "deplorable to trade on the emotion generated by the sniper incident," adding, "why saddle the legitimate, wholesome used of long guns with all that horse-radish."

National Rifle Association Executive Vice President Franklin Orth agreed, arguing that the bill would not prevent tragedies such as Monday's. Instead, he suggested that the campus shootings pointed up a need for "identification and isolation of deranged persons and the mentally ill in our society . . ."

Despite the renewed call for action, the Administration bill faces rough going on the Hill. If it squeaks through the Senate Judiciary Committee, it is expected to be referred to the Commerce Committee, headed by Sen. Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.), where numerous gun bills have died in the past.

In the House, the only bill that has won significant subcommittee support is a National Rifle Association-backed measure that would crack down on people who use guns in crimes.

Asked about the Senate Judiciary Committee delay, Dodd said, "Frankly, I was waiting to see if we had the votes, but I asked chairman James O. Eastland (D-Miss.) for a special meeting as soon as possible. I want a head count now."

Firearm Registration Opposed by Reagan

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 2 Ronald Reagan, Republican nominee for governor of California, promised today to "resist any effort that would take from the American citizen his right to own and possess firearms."

He also said he would oppose any law requiring registration of firearms.

Reagan spoke out on the subject at a news conference at which he was asked to comment on the sniper shootings at the University of Texas yesterday and specifically to say whether he felt greater control of firearms was needed.

The GOP candidate said he did not believe firearms control was really involved in the Texas shootings. At the same time that Reagan came out against registration laws or any infringement on the Constitutional right to bear arms, he said he believed some control of mail-order gun sales would be in order.